



History students at 'Hoppers' collaborate in colourful spaces where their voices are valued.

History Rises in Our West

History enrolments at Hoppers Crossing Secondary College have boomed in the past five years due to College-wide initiatives, innovations in the Humanities Key Learning Area, and an injection of new ideas by passionate History teachers.

James Ridley

Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

Located about 20 minutes from the city in the growth corridor of Wyndham in Melbourne's western suburbs, Hoppers Crossing Secondary College has been on a journey from a more technical-focused college since it opened in 1984 to a high-performing academic institution competing with the best in the state. 'Hoppers' was recently awarded the best state school in the west by *The Age* following an upsurge in VCE results over the past 10 years. Since 2010, the median study score has increased from 26 to 28 and the percentage of study scores above 40 rose from just 1% to nearly 5%.

Principal Keith Halge attributes this improvement to a number of college-wide initiatives, such as introducing a common instructional model, introducing exams from Year 9 onwards, the student improvement policy (which allows students in Years 7–10 to resubmit assessments after being given feedback) and the hard work of dedicated students and teachers. The Humanities Department has performed very well in recent years, with a number of students achieving study scores of 50.

Increased enrolments in Humanities electives in Year 9 and 10 have boosted numbers at VCE, with History in

particular gaining interest in recent years. In 2016, five students studied VCE History Revolutions, but this rose to 20 in 2017. Since 2019 we have run two Year 12 History classes comprising more than 30 students in total. Numbers have doubled in Year 10 and Year 11 since 2016. In Year 11 there are now more than 40 History students, while in Year 10 there are almost 80 students. There are four Year 10 classes this year—another record for the college.

New History teachers have joined the faculty to meet the increasing interest in the subject. This growth has been partly due to exciting electives offered and the systems put in place for junior years by the Humanities KLA.

'Prosperity Through Diversity' is the College's motto, and the Humanities Department has been influential in providing choices to match the interests of Hoppers' diverse student cohort. Since 2018 our Year 9 Humanities program has been split into two semesters of History and Geography. The rationale was to ensure that students had access to specialist teachers in each discipline to increase student engagement, performance and movement into senior Humanities pathways.

‘I started at Hoppers in 2018. I was hired partly due to an increase in numbers in History in Year 10 and VCE. This can be attributed to the building of strong, positive teacher–student relationships, as well as increasing student agency and voice. We continually survey and speak to students to hear their opinions on how best to differentiate content and assessment to suit their needs.’

Jessica Silcock, History and Humanities Teacher

This new program, together with exciting History-based electives such as Myths and Legends, Conflict in the Twentieth Century, Dangerous Dictators and International Espionage, has raised the profile of History at Hoppers. Eager History students in Years 9 and 10 have enjoyed being able to choose inquiry projects in these electives. In Myths and Legends, students create fanciful tales linked to history, community and environment. Change and continuity in popular culture is explored in Conflict in the Twentieth Century at Year 10, which has seen students produce many colourful presentations ranging from the history of Nintendo’s *Mario Bros.* to heavy metal music, the Met Gala and the evolution of basketball shoes. In Dangerous Dictators, students have ranked the most diabolical leaders in history and then built digital propaganda campaigns for their ‘favourite’ leader.

As part of the College’s High Achievers Preparation Program (HAPP), Humanities has offered an extension program for Year 9 students who meet weekly after school to create collaborative inquiry projects. In 2018, students linked events in the news from each week to key historical figures and events. In 2019 the HAPP group challenged the ‘Great Australian Silence’ by delving deeper into Indigenous Australian perspectives. Inquiry learning lets students direct their own education while simultaneously improving historical thinking and building key skills that are necessary for VCE and beyond. The variety of subjects offered and student-led learning

approaches have significantly increased the popularity of History.

Linking junior and senior History has also driven the rise of enrolments at Hoppers. As senior teachers are also expected to teach junior classes, important insights into the expectations of the VCE curriculum can be fostered as early as possible. Teachers constantly collaborate across the junior and senior levels, both during formal meeting times and informally, to ensure the historical skills necessary for the rigours of senior History are being taught in junior classes. For instance source analysis models like DAMMITU and See, Think, Wonder are used consistently, so they become second-nature for both teachers and students. Evaluating source reliability and usefulness, corroboration of sources and battling historians’ interpretations to support arguments are taught and assessed from Year 7. Decoding and writing strategies, standardised scaffolds and uniformity in rubrics for short answer questions, extended responses and essays have also been introduced at all year levels. These strategies have helped to break down the barriers that affect students’ writing stamina and confidence, especially in assessments and exams. This has been a wonderful support for our students, especially for those with low literacy, EAL/D (English as an additional language or dialect) backgrounds and learning difficulties.

The History curriculum at Hoppers is a constantly evolving document based on

‘The College has transformed itself over the past ten years through a targeted approach that has focused on developing high expectations for staff and students, building appropriate and authentic relationships and on a willingness from staff to trial different strategies to enhance student learning. This has certainly been evident in the History program at the College, where there has been a dramatic increase in demand from the student body to study History—something that in years gone by was very difficult to achieve and sustain.’

Keith Halge
Principal

'I was always drawn to History. The engaging classroom environment and the diversity in learning techniques have given me a feeling of confidence and joy in the subject. This has ultimately encouraged me to pursue a career as a History teacher.'

Haylee Downes, School Captain and VCE Revolutionary

'Hoppers Crossing Secondary College is fortunate to have talented and passionate teachers guiding our students to pursue their own dreams, and the Humanities team is no exception. Our History teachers have built excellent rapport with their students to develop interest and excitement about the subject, evidenced by the number of students who use the History room daily as their study and safe space. The relevance of History is always communicated strongly, especially as we continue to navigate challenging times that reflect the past, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, extremism, inequality and discrimination. The development of literacy strategies (such as the SASSYOLO formulas) continue to increase student confidence and performance, and I look forward to celebrating the excellent VCE results to come with the History team.'

Emily Hawes
Director of Humanities

feedback, data and Victorian curriculum best practice, all with the end goal of improving Year 12 results. Working groups of teachers at each year level collaborate to design skills-based pre-tests using the key skills from the Victorian curriculum. Pre-test results are then collated into Guttman charts for each class and across each cohort to identify the Zone of Proximal Development and differentiate students based on the skills they are yet to master. For example, a Year 9 pre-test in Term 1 this year illuminated that many students across multiple classes could not explain the difference between primary and secondary sources, so we were able to add more explicit examples and activities scaffolding this skill into the lessons. This data-driven diagnostic assessment informs lesson and assessment planning, ensuring that advanced students are not being taught what they already know and can be extended, and equally that activities are not too far out of the reach of others who have not yet mastered lower-order skills. Maintaining a consistent, focused, responsive, evidence-based approach across the KLA has seen History and Humanities continue to grow from strength to strength in both enrolments and results.

The growing popularity of History at Hoppers has also been due to the College's focus towards goal-orientated, activity-based learning. In History this has included kinaesthetic and tactile activities to get students moving around and problem-solving in groups, such as speed dating, jigsaw activities, human timelines, four corners, and taking a stand and justifying

opinions. A lively discussion focus in classes including debates (e.g. evaluating the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the necessity of the French and Russian Terror programs) and role-play re-enactments of key events (e.g. the Trial of King Louis XVI and Tennis Court Oath) have helped bring History alive at Hoppers. Classrooms have been decorated with posters from the History Teachers' Association of Victoria, learning tools created by teachers (e.g. timelines and word walls) and student work to promote a culture of recognition and appreciation of effort.

Student feedback has demonstrated that learning experiences outside the classroom are often the most fondly remembered parts of their History studies. Excursions and incursions have included Medieval Day, the Jewish Holocaust Centre, Courage to Care and presentations by Vietnam veterans, as well as taking Year 12 History students to La Mama Theatre in Carlton to see *Tchekov at the House of Special Purpose* as part of their Russian Revolution studies. Students have also been involved in speaking at ANZAC Day assemblies and marches.

Survey results conducted through PIVOT, Google Forms and Survey Monkey over the past four years have consistently shown that History is a subject where students feel their voices are heard and respected, their ideas are valued, and that they feel engaged and maintain attention. Students can attest to the rise of History enrolments at Hoppers, as History is a subject they look forward to in their timetable.